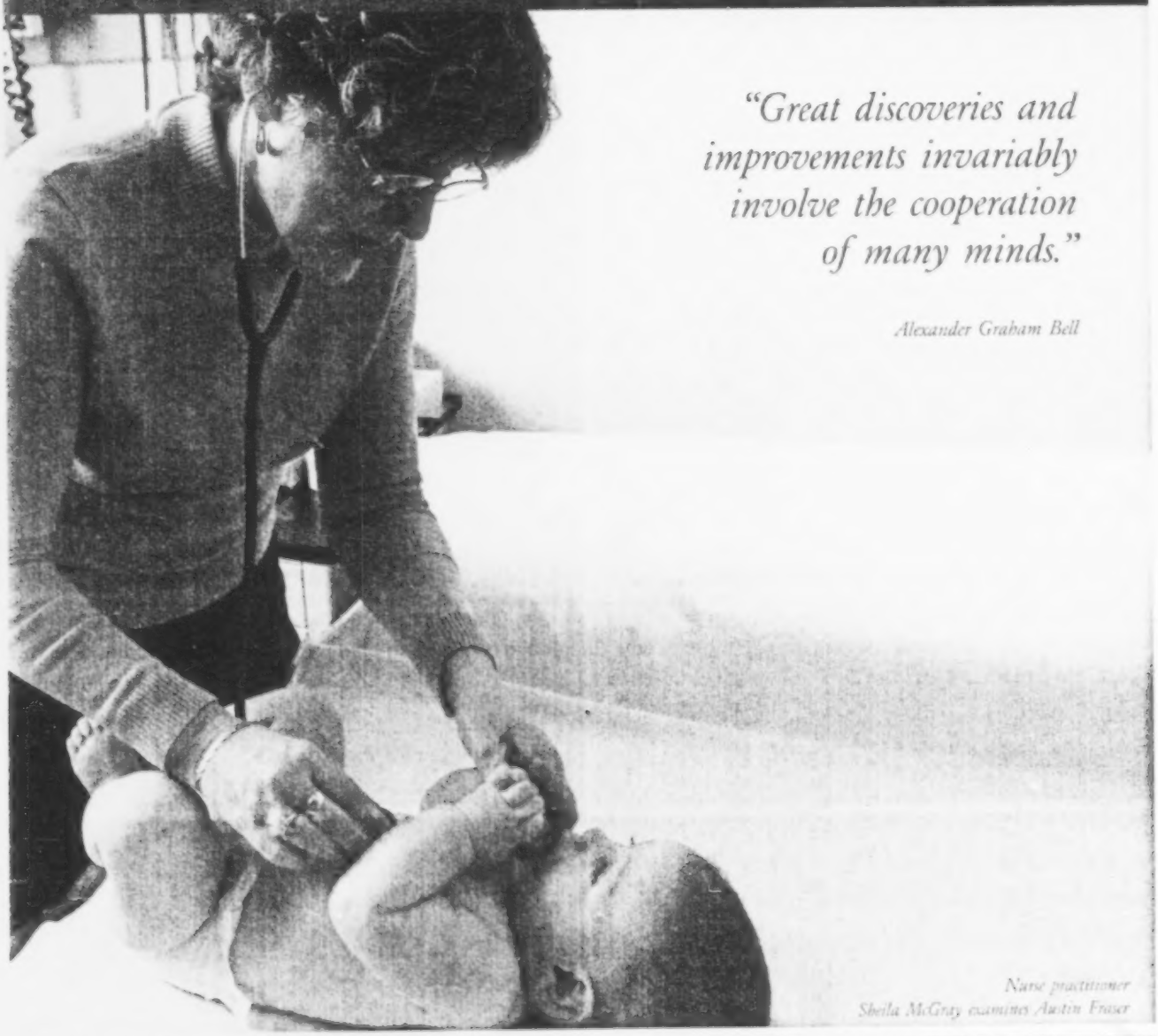
WORKING TOGETHER TOWARD *better care*

Ministers' Report to Nova Scotians 2004–2005



"Great discoveries and improvements invariably involve the cooperation of many minds."

Alexander Graham Bell

Nurse practitioner Sheila McGray examines Austin Fraser

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH

My primary responsibility is to ensure that you receive high-quality health care. Along with that comes an accountability for 45 per cent of the province's overall budget – close to two and a half billion dollars each year. That means I'm accountable to you as both taxpayers and people who depend on a solid health-care system.

Working Together Toward Better Care is my message to you that your money is being invested wisely. You'll read about health initiatives happening in communities across the province, as well as where we've made investments over the past year.

I hope this document also reinforces a fundamental fact that all provinces must grapple with: to sustain the health care we now have, several things need to happen – healthier living, finding alternative high-quality ways to deliver health care, and funding based on strategic planning and best evidence. Health is much more than what goes on in hospitals, and we have a responsibility to look at all aspects of health care. This includes looking at primary health care and health promotion, from how we immunize babies to how we care for our seniors.

Our health system is working for Nova Scotians. That being said, we are continually striving to make it better. We shouldn't let the criticism of health care in the public forum overshadow the innovative good work being done by the thousands of people who work in our hospitals, labs and nursing homes.

This document will shed light on many challenges we're facing in health care. It will also highlight the work of countless Nova Scotians dedicated to working together and helping you and your families receive the care and support you need, when and where you need it.

Angus MacIsaac
Minister of Health

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH PROMOTION

Improving the health of Nova Scotians is a great challenge – and we are making progress.

Nova Scotians are making a positive difference in the health of their communities. Individuals, groups, and organizations have stepped up and taken the initiative to help people take an active role in improving their own health.

Physical activity grants, the *Active Kids, Healthy Kids* strategy, and recreation facility development grants are just a few of the programs we offer to support people at the community level. The tobacco strategy is a good example of success. Our progress report released in January shows that smoking rates among Nova Scotians have decreased from 30 per cent in 1999 to 22 per cent in 2003.

We have produced an internationally recognized sex education resource and have new initiatives planned to address problem drinking and injury prevention, as well as healthy eating and physical activity.

There is a lot of work to be done. Over time, a healthier population will cut down health-care costs, reduce wait times, and decrease the incidence of chronic disease. Most importantly, a healthier population will create a better quality of life in Nova Scotia. This is a common goal of Health Promotion and the Department of Health.

Rodney MacDonald
Minister of Health Promotion

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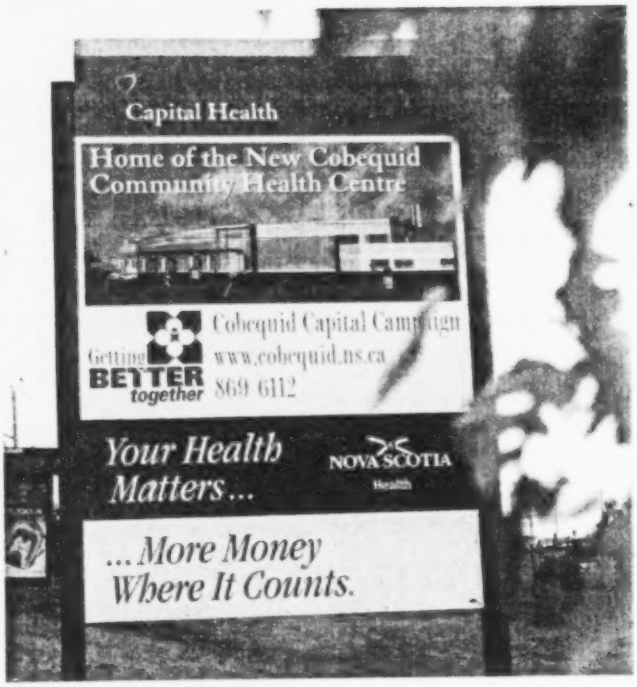
INVESTING MONEY *when and where it counts*



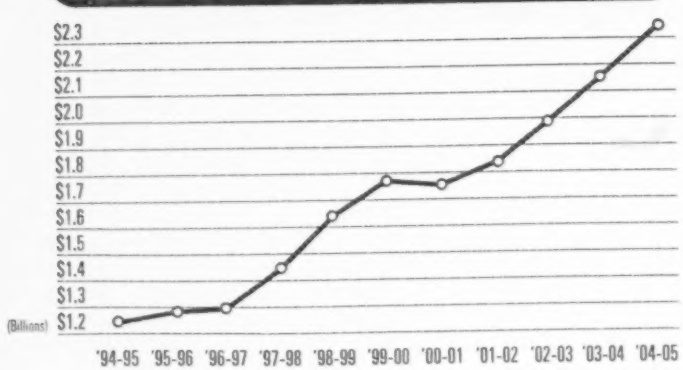
Cobequid Community Health Centre

In 2004–2005, construction on the new Cobequid Community Health Centre began. The new facility is expected to open in early 2006.

Every hour, $267,000 is spent on health care in Nova Scotia. Chronic disease alone costs the province approximately $3 billion per year. That, along with an aging population, advances in technology, and increased drug costs, are all driving the cost of health care. Therefore, with available resources, and a great deal of research and planning, government has made investments to best serve Nova Scotians:

- The province is making good on its promise to help children with autism by funding early intensive behavioural intervention treatment. The treatment, costing $4 million, will be offered through district health authorities and the IWK Health Centre by qualified professionals.
- In December, $19.15 million in federal funding was put toward building projects across the province: the IWK Health Centre received $6.48 million toward its restructuring of the IWK Children's site; Capital Health received $4.04 million to expand the QEII Emergency Room; Valley Regional Hospital received $6.37 million to add 21 hospital beds and to expand its emergency room; $2.25 million was dedicated to the Queens Primary Health Care facility.
- Grants totalling $500,000 have been invested in communities across the province to offer physical activity programs specific to their needs. The new programs are allowing people to participate right in their own communities.

NS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BUDGET



"We're delivering more health care in communities and we're moving from an emphasis on illness care to improving the health of a population. Look at what we've done so well in Nova Scotia – how we've been innovative and creative with fewer resources than a lot of other parts of the country. We're very proud of that."

Anne McGuire, President and CEO, IWK Health Centre

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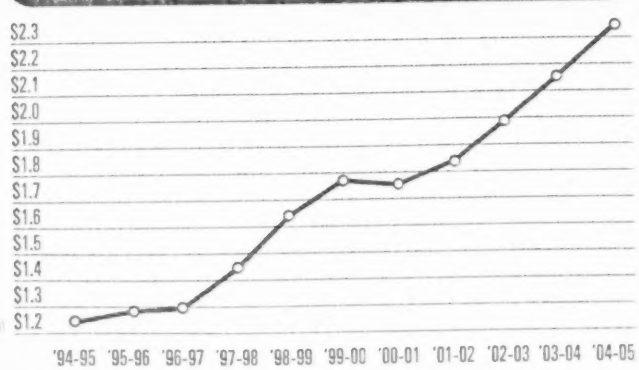

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HELPING PEOPLE *stay healthy*

It seems simple — the best long-term solution to wait lists and health-care spending is to keep people healthy. Nova Scotians have some of the highest rates of preventable disease in Canada. Nova Scotia Health Promotion was created to help make Nova Scotia a healthier and safer place to work, live, and play. Health Promotion is focusing on six strategic areas: healthy eating; physical activity; tobacco control; injury prevention; addiction prevention; and healthy sexuality. This work, combined with immunization and other public health initiatives, is giving Nova Scotians more opportunities to be healthy and stay healthy.

Lily and Maureen Reid (from the IWK) getting their flu shot

Immunization is one of our best defences against vaccine-preventable diseases. Nova Scotia has one of the best flu immunization rates in the country. In 2004, 83 per cent of seniors had a flu shot.

The province is taking another step in protecting the health of children in Nova Scotia by providing publicly funded vaccinations against meningitis, chickenpox, and whooping cough. The province will spend an additional $9 million over the next three years, as part of the National Immunization Strategy, to expand existing programs. More than 40,000 children and adolescents in Nova Scotia will benefit from these new vaccines this year alone.

Working collaboratively with Health Canada, other provinces, and the district health authorities, the province continues to prepare for a range of emergencies, such as smallpox and pandemic influenza. The most recent step in planning was the province's agreement to purchase antivirals to add to our existing stockpile in the event of a pandemic.

Andrea Donovan

SMOKE FREE AROUND ME GETS SOME HEALTHY RESULTS

Andrea Donovan and her local health authorities were very successful asking Cape Breton residents to register their homes as smoke free. Thanks to their campaign, *Smoke Free Around Me*, over 800 households registered - and counting! Now with the help of Health Promotion's Nancy Hoddinott, that campaign is going out to the whole province.

Smoke Free Around Me aims to make Nova Scotia a healthier place to live, and so does Health Promotion. That's why we're proud to support community partners like these.

Sex? A Healthy Sexuality Resource was distributed to youth aged 12-17 years, by Public Health Services in the district health authorities in partnership with participating schools and community groups. The book provides up-to-date, non-judgmental information to help youth make safe, healthy choices about their sexual health. Over 500 youth were involved in the resource's development. It can be viewed on the Health Promotion website. **www.gov.ns.ca/ohp**

Injury Prevention: Health Promotion is working with stakeholders and other government departments to develop and implement the first government-funded Injury Prevention Strategy in Canada. Some of the components of the strategy include: reducing falls among seniors by providing annual funding to the Community Links initiative, *Preventing Falls Together*; reducing the number of deaths on our highways by changing people's driving habits; developing an Injury Surveillance Strategy; training stakeholders to design, implement, and evaluate injury prevention programs in their communities; and designing an evaluation framework for the strategy. Health Promotion is co-hosting the Canadian Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion Conference in November 2005.

Healthy Eating Nova Scotia, the first provincial strategy of its kind, was released during Nutrition Month in March. It was developed by the Healthy Eating Action Group of the Nova Scotia Alliance for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity, in partnership with Health Promotion. The strategy identifies the following four key areas: breastfeeding, children and youth, fruit and vegetable consumption, and food security. The goal of the strategy is to improve the nutritional health and well-being of Nova Scotians. Good nutrition is important — it contributes to the prevention of chronic disease.

Helping children and youth develop good eating habits early is a priority of Nova Scotia Health Promotion

Trisha Cameron and the Snow Shoe Project really got Antigonish moving. Fifty-two pairs of snowshoes were made available to kids in local schools and to the community on weekends. Hundreds of people had fun in the snow and got fit at the same time!

Problem drinking is one of Health Promotion's priorities for the next year. A provincial stakeholder meeting was held with the district health authorities' addiction services to determine their needs and perspective. Participation in the Canadian Addiction Survey has also provided baseline information on problem drinking. Health Promotion's Addiction Services Division has hired a Co-ordinator of Prevention and Community Education to lead the process of program development.

Physical activity: A recent study shows that Nova Scotians in the highest income category are significantly (16 per cent) more active than those in all other income categories. The percentage of Nova Scotians who are physically active increases from 37 per cent for those in the lowest income group to 53 per cent in the highest income group. Health Promotion is helping to even the playing field by investing in such programs as recreation facility development, sport animators in schools, the *Active Kids, Healthy Kids* strategy, and *KidSport*. Our goal is to provide an equal opportunity for all Nova Scotians to participate in physical activity, regardless of their economic situation.

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TRAINING, RECRUITING & KEEPING *our health professionals*

Having the right mix of health-care services and professionals across the province is at the heart of everything we do.

Recruitment of health-care professionals continues to be an ongoing challenge, not only in Nova Scotia, but across the country and around the globe. Meeting those challenges means that Nova Scotians will increasingly receive care through a team of health-care professionals.

Our bursary program will ensure that 48 certified medical laboratory technologists report to work in Nova Scotia in the near future.

Since April 1, 2004, more than 50 new physicians have been recruited to Nova Scotia (32 family physicians and 18 specialists). We also know that some have left during this same period; but overall, there has been a modest net growth in physician numbers.

More doctors are choosing balanced lifestyles and are able to work in many different areas across the country and around the world. It's a challenge that needs innovative solutions – and we're coming up with them. Active recruitment efforts are ongoing across the province – it's a collective effort with district health authorities, communities, and groups such as Doctors Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia is fortunate to have highly skilled registered nurses and licensed practical nurses who are committed to providing the best possible nursing care. Since being introduced in 2001, Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy continues to demonstrate success in improving the recruitment, retention, and work life of nurses in Nova Scotia.

In 2003-2004, the Nursing Strategy's relocation allowance helped 113 nurses from other parts of Canada, the United States, and other countries relocate to work in Nova Scotia.

The overall number of employed nurses is higher, more nurses work in permanent rather than casual positions, and we are retaining approximately 80 per cent of our new graduates, most of whom found full-time employment.

The Cape Breton District Health Authority's Family Medicine Residency program provides a positive teaching environment for young doctors. Each year one or two graduates from the program decide to stay and practice medicine in Cape Breton.

WAITING
for tests, treatments and services

Improving wait times while maintaining high-quality care is central to the Your Health Matters plan. We know that people are waiting too long for some tests, treatment, and services. This is a concern not only in Nova Scotia but across Canada.

The Canadian government rated this as a top health priority and in December 2004 provided additional funds to provinces to help combat rising wait times. Nova Scotia invested its share ($62 million) directly to fund projects and initiatives that will reduce wait times, increase the number of talented health professionals, and encourage Nova Scotians to lead healthier lifestyles. These measures will ultimately improve access and lower wait times.

We often hear of hospital beds being taken up by patients needing long-term care. This leads to long emergency room wait times and added pressure on our district health authorities. The solution to this problem is complex and involves looking at the overall health system for solutions. The Department of Health and various groups are working on a long-term plan to see how people can get better care in areas of acute care, continuing care, and mental health.

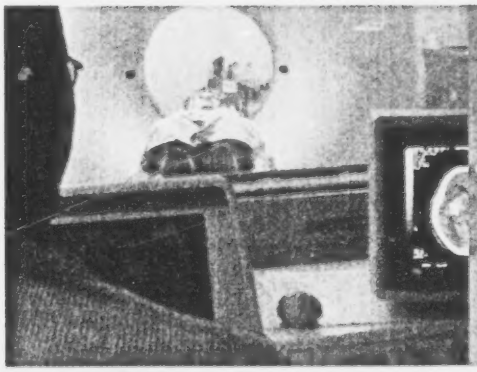
"Accessibility has long been identified as a barrier for people needing health services. Yarmouth, Shelburne and Digby County residents can soon have an MRI scan at Yarmouth Regional Hospital making access more convenient."

Blaise MacNeil, CEO, South West Health

According to a recent national survey, more Nova Scotians have access to a regular family doctor than any other Canadians. 95 per cent of Nova Scotians have a regular family doctor, well above the national average of 86 per cent.

Since 2003, we have invested in many areas of the health system and we are seeing results:

- Nova Scotia is working on ways to collect accurate comparable information on the actual times that patients wait for various health services in the province. As standardized wait-time information becomes available by location, it will be shared with Nova Scotians.
- Government announced an additional four new MRI machines to be located in Kentville, Antigonish, New Glasgow and Yarmouth. This means that Nova Scotia will have one MRI scanner to 117,500 people, the best ratio in Canada. In addition, Capital Health will receive replacement MRI equipment.
- Three new mammography units have been added to the Nova Scotia Breast Screening Program to replace aging equipment. The addition of these units will make sure women in Nova Scotia get faster and more precise breast screening and diagnostic tests.
- Capital Health's fifth linear accelerator is now up and running, thanks to the federal medical equipment fund. Thirty more patients per day can be treated with radiation therapy now that the new accelerator and simulator are in place. This reduces the overall wait from the time a doctor decides to treat with radiotherapy to actual treatment by an average of one week. Previously, average wait times were four to five weeks.



PROVINCIAL WAIT TIME ADVISORY COMMITTEE

A new provincial committee has been established to advise the government on wait times. The 12-member committee has representatives from various health professions, district health authorities, and the public, and will be chaired by George Cooper, a law partner with the firm McInnes Cooper in Halifax and former Member of Parliament. The committee will help identify current wait times pressure points throughout the system and make recommendations to the Minister of Health on ways to reduce long waits. The formation of this committee is one more step in government's plan to improving access to health services.

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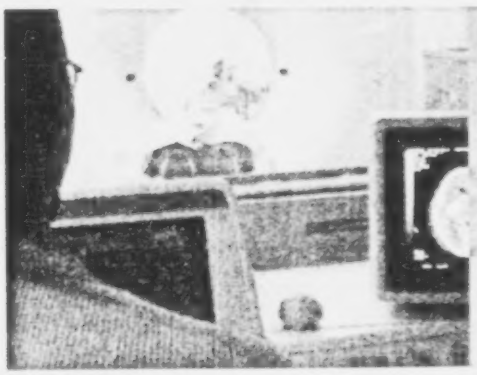

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DELIVERING
health care within communities

"I think it's ground breaking - we're the first province to have adopted a single information system for our district health authorities – a province-wide system of sharing information. We're already seeing the benefits of being able to share this information in our district, and we're getting very close to seeing the benefits of having all hospitals in the province linked."

John Malcom,
CEO, Cape Breton District Health Authority

Nova Scotia thrives on the strength of its communities. Therefore, it only makes sense that we build our health-care system around that strength – that's the future of health care in Nova Scotia. Our health is affected by what is around us, from health services to culture and education, and slowly but surely people are gaining more access to care closer to home – from breast screening and foot care, to emergency health services.

The Cumberland South Rural Practice Network is an innovative primary health care initiative designed to service the communities of River Hebert, Parrsboro, and Advocate Harbour. Three family physicians will work with three nurse practitioners to form a collaborative practice that is family focused with the goal to provide essential services to their communities.

There are 63 Emergency Health Services (EHS) sites across the province in communities from Yarmouth to New Waterford, to ensure you get the immediate care you need, when you need it.

Soon, thanks to the Nova Scotia Hospital Information System (NShIS), health professionals will be able to access patient information at the click of a button, regardless of where the patient is from, and regardless of where the patient is at the time.

PREVENTING THE ABUSE AND MISUSE OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

The province is investing over $700,000 in 2005 to enhance the prescription monitoring program with a new computerized information system that will link with all pharmacies across the province.

Nova Scotia is the only Atlantic province to have a prescription monitoring program. The program tracks how a number of medications are prescribed to Nova Scotians. The 600 tracked medications are effective, yet they can be dangerous if taken inappropriately. In order to discourage the misuse of these medications, the Department of Health introduced a number of strategies in 2004, including:

NEW LEGISLATION, which will make it easier for doctors, dentists, and pharmacists to share critical information about patients' prescription history and patterns to help them make better decisions.

ADDITIONAL EDUCATION about the effective use of pain medications and prescription drug abuse is being offered to groups of doctors.

Minister MacIsaac and Cheryl Doiron visit with youth from the Guysborough Youth Health and Services Centre

Across the province, youth are helping youth make healthier choices. Approximately 37 youth health centres operate throughout Nova Scotia, providing a range of health supports and services to youth, such as health education, health promotion, information and referral, follow-up and support, as well as some clinical services.

"Our youth health centre is a safe place where young people can feel comfortable asking questions about everything from stress to sex to mental health. You can get counselling, you can get pap tests, or you can get information. It's a pretty important place for us."

Laura MacKinnon, student,
North Nova Education Centre, New Glasgow

CANCER CARE NOVA SCOTIA

Cancer Care Nova Scotia continues to play a leading role in improving the cancer system in Nova Scotia through innovative programs, including Cancer Patient Navigation, Interprofessional Core Curriculum, and Palliative Care Front-Line Education.

NAVIGATION helps patients and families get timely information about cancer. It also ensures that family doctors know about services that can help their patients.

THE CURRICULUM helps health professionals throughout the province obtain the information and training they need to provide high-quality cancer services to patients.

PALLIATIVE CARE Front-Line Education helps health-care workers and volunteers provide better symptom management, comfort, and compassionate end-of-life care.

DELIVERING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Most people receive mental health treatment in the community and not in acute-care hospital beds.

Nova Scotia is committed to building a better, more responsive mental health system. In February 2003 government released its strategic direction for mental health for the next five to ten years.

These standards were the first step of our strategic framework. The next step is to continue working with the district health authorities and the IWK to identify and address priority areas in the system and respond in a planned way.

Through the Healthy Beginnings: Enhanced Home Visiting Program, Public Health Services in all health districts offers enhanced home visiting support to families facing challenges for the first three years of their child's life. In addition to public health staff, trained community home visitors work with the family to promote a healthy parent-child relationship, foster healthy child development, and link the family to community resources that further enhance opportunities for the healthy growth and development of the baby and the family as a whole.

86 per cent of Nova Scotians are satisfied with overall health care in Nova Scotia.

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CEO, Cape Breton District Health Authority

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The Cumberland South Rural Practice Network is an innovative primary health care initiative designed to service the communities of River Hebert, Parrsboro, and Advocate Harbour. Three family physicians will work with three nurse practitioners to form a collaborative practice that is family focused with the goal to provide essential services to their communities.

There are 63 Emergency Health Services (EHS) sites across the province in communities from Yarmouth to New Waterford, to ensure you get the immediate care you need, when you need it.

Soon, thanks to the Nova Scotia Hospital Information System (NShIS), health professionals will be able to access patient information at the click of a button, regardless of where the patient is from, and regardless of where the patient is at the time.

PREVENTING THE ABUSE AND MISUSE OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

The province is investing over $700,000 in 2005 to enhance the prescription monitoring program with a new computerized information system that will link with all pharmacies across the province.

Nova Scotia is the only Atlantic province to have a prescription monitoring program. The program tracks how a number of medications are prescribed to Nova Scotians. The 600 tracked medications are effective, yet they can be dangerous if taken inappropriately. In order to discourage the misuse of these medications, the Department of Health introduced a number of strategies in 2004, including:

NEW LEGISLATION, which will make it easier for doctors, dentists, and pharmacists to share critical information about patients' prescription history and patterns to help them make better decisions.

ADDITIONAL EDUCATION about the effective use of pain medications and prescription drug abuse is being offered to groups of doctors.

Minister MacIsaac and Cheryl Dejoie visit with youth from the Guysborough Youth Health and Social Centre.

Across the province, youth are helping youth make healthier choices. Approximately 35 youth health centres operate throughout Nova Scotia, providing a range of health supports and services to youth, such as health education, health promotion, information and referral, follow-up and support, as well as some clinical services.

"Our youth health centre is a safe place where young people can feel comfortable asking questions about everything from stress to sex to mental health. You can get counselling, you can get pap tests, or you can get information. It's a pretty important place for us."

Laura MacKinnon, student,
North Nova Education Centre, New Glasgow

CANCER CARE NOVA SCOTIA

Cancer Care Nova Scotia continues to play a leading role in improving the cancer system in Nova Scotia through innovative programs, including Cancer Patient Navigation, Interprofessional Core Curriculum, and Palliative Care Front-Line Education.

NAVIGATION helps patients and families get timely information about cancer. It also ensures that family doctors know about services that can help their patients.

THE CURRICULUM helps health professionals throughout the province obtain the information and training they need to provide high-quality cancer services to patients.

PALLIATIVE CARE Front-Line Education helps health-care workers and volunteers provide better symptom management, comfort, and compassionate end-of-life care.

DELIVERING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Most people receive mental health treatment in the community and not in acute-care hospital beds.

Nova Scotia is committed to building a better, more responsive mental health system. In February 2003 government released its strategic direction for mental health for the next five to ten years.

These standards were the first step of our strategic framework. The next step is to continue working with the district health authorities and the IWK to identify and address priority areas in the system and respond in a planned way.

Through the Healthy Beginnings: Enhanced Home Visiting Program, Public Health Services in all health districts offers enhanced home visiting support to families facing challenges for the first three years of their child's life. In addition to public health staff, trained community home visitors work with the family to promote a healthy parent-child relationship, foster healthy child development, and link the family to community resources that further enhance opportunities for the healthy growth and development of the baby and the family as a whole.

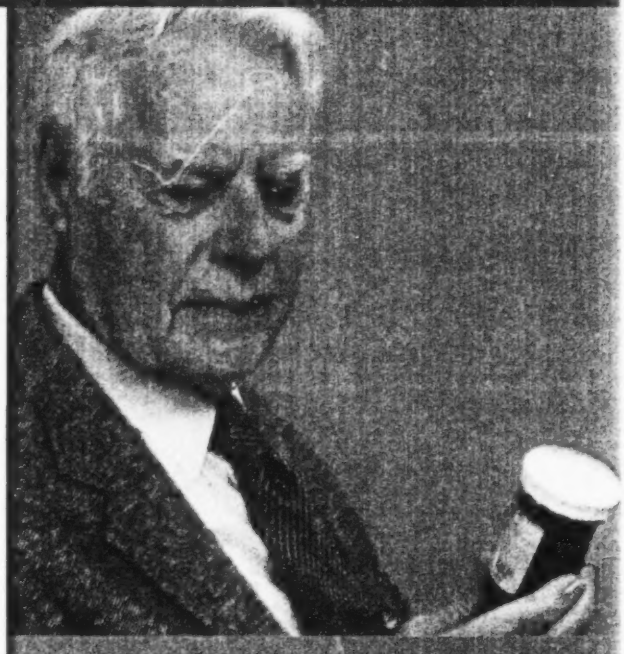
86 per cent of Nova Scotians are satisfied with overall health care in Nova Scotia.

CARING *for seniors*

Each month, 700 Nova Scotians turn 65–a significant statistic since we know that seniors visit doctors more, use more medications, and depend on the health system more than any other population. Sustaining this, as our population continues to age, is an ongoing challenge. Several investments in seniors over the past year, accompanied by the good work done by the Senior Citizens' Secretariat, will support our seniors as they age.

As of January 1, 2005, Nova Scotians requiring long-term care services no longer have to pay health-care costs. This will cost an additional $45 million each year and affects 144 facilities, including nursing homes, residential care facilities, and community-based options. Independence, fairness, equity, and choice are what Nova Scotia's new approach to funding long-term care services are built on.

The long-term care budget has increased from $155 million in 2000 to $246 million in 2004–2005.



Nova Scotia seniors will not see any fee increase in the Seniors' Pharmacare program this year. The province is investing an additional $14.2 million in the program to prevent an increase in premiums and co-payments.

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CONTINUING CARE

It's evident that more needs to be done to address challenges in the long run. That's why the province is turning to Nova Scotians for input through consultations with families, health-care professionals, and groups from across the province. We want to hear how they want to see long-term care delivered, today and in the years ahead. The process will examine the role of home care, nursing homes, end-of-life care, health promotion, and other alternative levels of care.

Continuing Care toll free line 1.800.225.7225

MESSAGE from DEPUTY HEALTH MINISTER
CEO, Office of Health Promotion

We are working very hard to make the health-care system work for you. We have far to go, but we'll continue to plan and make decisions based on the best interest of the province's health. As you've read in this report, we are investing in programs and initiatives, equipment and services.

But health is a shared responsibility, and I ask you to take a look around at the Nova Scotians choosing to live healthy lives through healthy eating, immunizing children, and staying active. We need to champion them and learn from them. We're doing our best to have the system in place to treat you when you need health care most. But we're also doing our best to provide you with the tools to be healthy and stay healthy. I hope you will take advantage of them.

Sincerely,
Cheryl Doiron

HEALTH DOLLARS AT WORK

- On any given day, there are 285 visits to the Cape Breton Regional Hospital emergency room.
  It costs $25,268 each day to run the ER.
- It costs $157,826 a day to run an operating room at the QEII Health Sciences Centre.
- On any given day at Valley Regional Hospital, there are 92 emergency room visits.
  It costs $7,950 to run Valley Regional's emergency room for one day.
- It costs $9,020 a day to run an operating room at the Yarmouth Regional Hospital.
- On any given day, there are 55 visits to the South Shore Regional Hospital emergency room.
- It costs $26,853 a day to run an operating room at the IWK Health Centre.
- $1.6 million is spent each day on insured services (dental work, physician services, prescriptions).
- $596,505,371 was spent on insured services in Nova Scotia in 2003-2004.

**costs vary in facilities according to a number of factors, e.g. size and scope of services, number of operating rooms, volume of patients.*

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"Great strides in the area of injury prevention will be made tomorrow because you cared today."

Heidi Schiller, QEII Foundation, thanks Nova Scotia Health Promotion for funding bicycle helmets for children who need them. The helmets were distributed through the QEII's Division of Neurosurgery.

We'd like to hear your feedback on this publication and hear more about how you would like to receive information on the provincial health-care system in the future. To provide feedback visit: **www.gov.ns.ca/health/ministersreport/feedback.asp**

NOVA SCOTIA
Health
Health Promotion